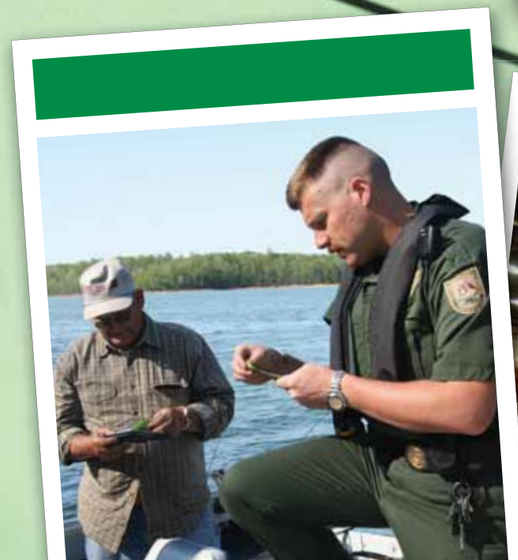
SPECIALIZED FORCES

/ Abbie Darst, Program Coordinator

Typically, when most Kentuckians, including the bulk of law enforcement officers, think of their law enforcement counterparts, they first envision the average beat officer at a local police department or sheriff's office, patrolling the streets or writing traffic tickets. Some leap to a mental picture of detectives, interviewed on the nightly news after a major robbery or murder, with bright yellow crime-scene tape flashing in the background, or even special units that focus on accident reconstruction or forensics. Few are aware there are more than 200 certified officers in Kentucky that start out just like these typical officers, but play an entirely different, very specialized role across the state. These officers have been commissioned to enforce laws that many may not be aware exist, but are integral to enforcement, regulation and criminal prosecution throughout the commonwealth. Consider them the Kentucky law enforcement equivalent of Special Forces. >>



Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources conservation officer, Richard Waite, II, checks for a current fishing license on Laurel River Lake. Patrolling Kentucky's lakes is just one of many duties for which the department's officers are responsible. Water patrol usually begins in April and ends in September.

/ Photos by Elizabeth Thomas

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Officers of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, Office of Alcoholic Beverage Control, Office of Charitable Gaming, Division of Insurance Fraud Investigation and Division of Animal Health also serve and protect the citizens of Kentucky and their livelihood. Required by law to meet the same standards as other law enforcement officers in the state, new specialists with these agencies begin their law enforcement journey in identical fashion to a typical local police department recruit.

After hire at the agency, they are required to complete the 18-week basic training academy at the Department of Criminal Justice Training as well as meet the 40-hour advanced individual training mandate each year. Most of them also have an additional field-training program administered by the agency to complete after graduating from the academy. Matter of fact, because of the nature of their positions, some require extensive, specialized training.

Walking on the wild side

Officers with the KDFWR leave the 18-week academy and immediately enter an additional 12 weeks of specialized training specific to their duties and the situations they will encounter while on the job. A KDFWR officer's beat is not a city strip, town square or two lane route leading out of town, instead officers patrol the banks of Kentucky's streams, rivers and lakes; forests; and fields, the homes to many species of wildlife. These officers must understand and be able to maneuver through every aspect of Kentucky's natural world.

"A lot of people come to work for us because they like to hunt and fish, but they don't know every aspect of what we have to deal with," said KDFWR Lt. Stuart Bryant who works in the 9th Law Enforcement District in McCreary County.

Their 12-week academy includes weeklong sessions on trapping, water fowl identification, boat operation and additional firearms training. In the water fowl identification training, for instance, officers are taught how to identify numerous species of ducks just by their wings. Depending on the region to which a KDFWR officer is assigned, he or she may or may not come in contact with specific wildlife issues but all learn the same information. According to Bryant, officers in the western part of the state deal more with water fowl, while those in the east have various issues with elk and in south-central Kentucky black bears have posed new challenges, so officers are cross trained in every area to potentially offer assistance across the state if needed.

Obviously, conservation officers deal with much more than wildlife concerns. These officers deal extensively with people who use wildlife and other natural resources for enjoyment, recreation and sport.

"Our big thing is compliance," Bryant said. "All we want people to do is go out and get their hunting and fishing licenses and comply with the law."

For Bryant, in southern Kentucky, the laws he focuses on enforcing change through the seasons, changing his job function on a continual basis. In February, hunting and fishing licenses expire, perpetuating frequent license checks in April and May. Turkey season opens in the middle of April, creating potential baiting problems, where hunters leave corn and other bait to lure turkeys to specific sites, which is illegal. With Cumberland and Laurel lakes in his jurisdiction, water enforcement also begins in April. In 1994, KDFWR merged with the water patrol, adding responsibilities for boaters on the lakes.

"Everybody just sees the lake as a place to party and I guess it has been for years, but it's not a safe place to party," Bryant said, citing issues with DUIs, public intoxication, boat collisions, drownings and domestic-violence calls on house boats as everyday occurrences during the summer season. "It's just like a city on the water."

In September, as the summer boating season comes to a close, deer hunting season opens. >>

WILDLIFE MEETS FORENSICS

Interagency interaction took on a whole different look for Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources Lt. Stuart Bryant several years ago when trying to capture a deer poacher he and other officers had been after for years. In an attempt to get conclusive evidence that would allow him to finally put the poacher behind bars, Bryant took a deer suspected to be a part of the case to the forensic laboratory in Frankfort. Forensic anthropologist, Emily Craig, x-rayed and performed an autopsy on the deer, providing Bryant with information regarding the gun from which the bullet came and other extensive evidence needed to make his case.

"They liked to have died when we walked into the court room with her and all of that forensic evidence," Bryant said. "They were ready to plead guilty."

Conservation officers deal with issues during deer-hunting season, such as spotlighters. Spotlighting is an activity hunters use to find and startle deer using a bright light. Moreover, one of the most dangerous aspects of a conservation officer's job comes as a result of interacting with hunters.

"From our perspective, almost everybody we deal with has a gun," Bryant emphasized. "I can't just roll up out of the truck with my pistol drawn every time I encounter someone with a gun, unlike an officer in Lexington. You never know if someone is going to be dangerous and you try to treat them all the same until something changes – that's the difficult part. We've got to be used to it and realize it is just part of dealing with the people we encounter. It's part of the job that is sometimes hard to overcome."

This issue is brought to officers' attention and thoroughly discussed during the firearms training they receive in their 12--week academy.

Covert investigations is another inevitable part of a conservation officer's job. Between decoy details and maintaining surveillance on a fisherman or officers' sitting in the dark all night waiting to find spotlighters, much of the preliminary work officers do before they actually interact with any perpetrator is conducted behind the scenes and goes unnoticed.

"We do a lot of covert things, which is why no one knows what we do," Bryant said. "We don't do anything any different … but nobody really knows what we do and that's kind of a good thing."

Bryant recalled a night when he came upon several raccoon hunters. As they stared at the ground following the light of their flashlights, Bryant just walked up and joined the group. They even held open gates for him as he walked with them unnoticed until one of the flashlights hit his boots. The hunters looked up in surprise and apprehension realizing he was not part of the original group.

"It really is a great job," he said. "Some people can't do it. You really have to like to hunt and fish to do it. You will learn eventually about those things that you didn't do before, but it's slow."

A natural enjoyment of the nature of the job does play a major role in a conservation officer's ability to perform the job long term. Since they all work out of their homes, and cover such a wide range of activity associated with wildlife enforcement, they have to stay motivated to get out and do the best job possible.

"The good thing about this job is every day is different," Bryant said. "I can make of it what I want to. And most of our guys get out and make the job and they do it how they want to do it."

Schedule flexibility can be a blessing and a curse not only for KDFWR officers but for all officers that work for these specialized state agencies. Because their work stations are at their homes, they receive calls at any time, day or night.

"It's a thankless job and they often don't realize that a lot of times we are asleep when they call," Bryant said of many situations to which he gets called.

Also, the agency size plays a role in how they do their jobs. In McCreary County, Bryant is the only conservation officer in his county, forcing him to rely on the three deputies and five troopers that also serve the county. For Bryant, the working relationships he's built among the various other area agencies are very important.

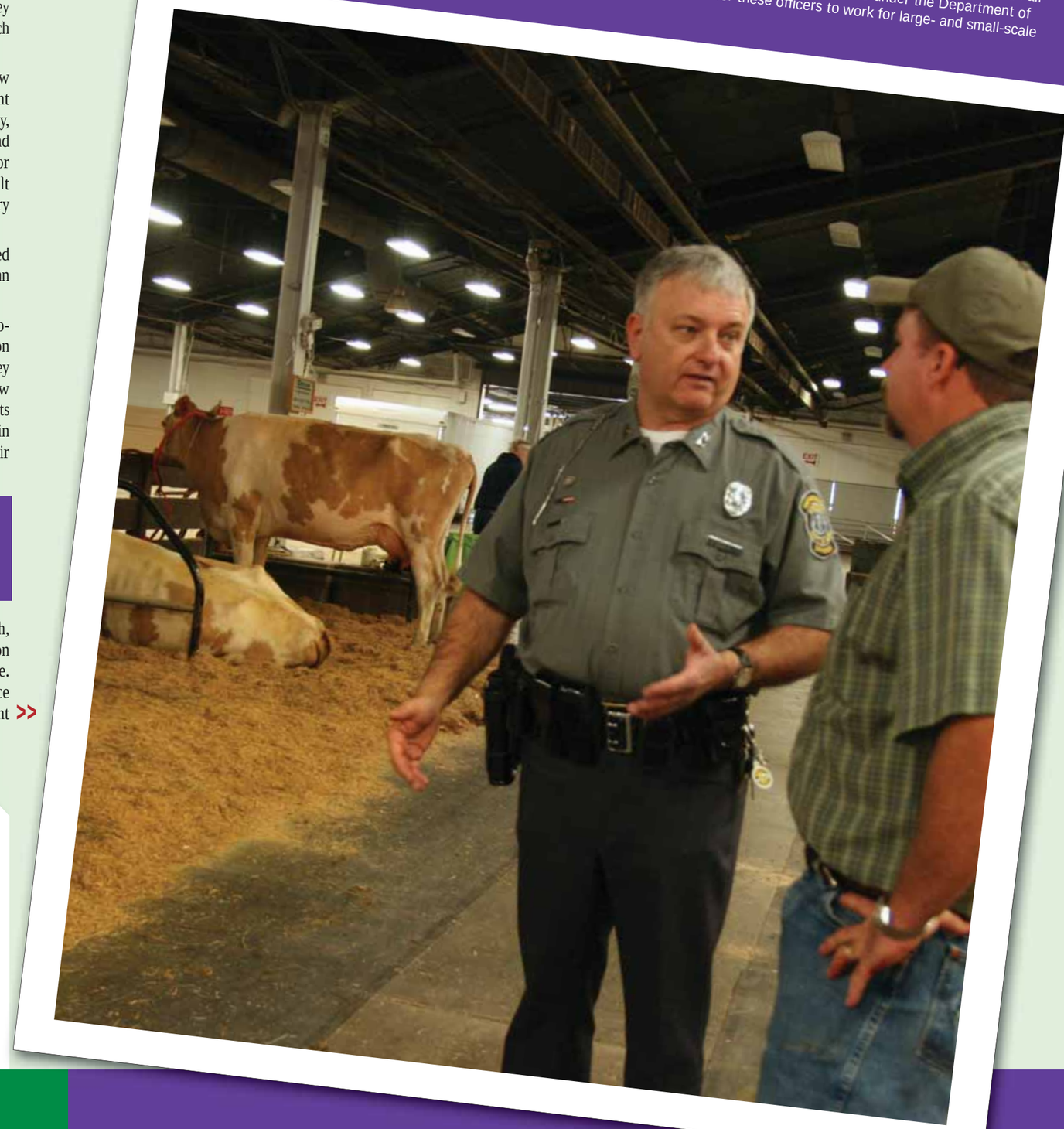
"We're all buddies," he said. "If you need help, even in the middle of the night, we can call on each other and they'll come."

Interagency interaction is definitely a two-way road for Bryant and other conservation officers across the state. Just as much as they can benefit from the assistance of other law enforcement officers, other local departments and officers can turn to KDFWR for help in numerous areas that they cannot tackle on their own.

Protecting some of Kentucky's top agricultural commodities

Officers with the Division of Animal Health, like KDFWR, spend the bulk of their time on the job dealing with animals more than people. Uniquely set up as a division within the Office of the State Veterinarian under the Department

Division of Animal Health Enforcement Officer George Offutt talks to a dairy farmer at a dairy expo held at the Kentucky State Fair and Exposition Center in Louisville. The division is part of the Office of the Veterinarian, which is housed under the Department of Agriculture. The Kentucky State Fair and Exposition Center is a common venue for these officers to work for large- and small-scale livestock events.



PROTECTING ANIMAL HEALTH THROUGH TRYING SEASONS

In April, animal health investigator Shane Mitchell worked a case in Rowan County where 31 horses were found dead on a farm and 10 others in extremely poor health. Mitchell worked closely with Rowan County Sheriff's Office investigators, charging the farm owner with violating state law regarding the disposition of animal carcasses.

"This was an animal abuse case, but there were some extenuating circumstances," Mitchell said. "You have one thought about what's going on when you pull up, but when you get there and get the other part of the story, you see it's not as black and white as you first thought. Some people will get rid of their houses before their animals and in their minds they are taking care of the animals, but they can barely take care of themselves."

In the past year, cases like this one in Rowan County are all too familiar to animal health investigators, due to the 2007 drought, which created a lack of feed necessary for most farmers to sustain their herds.

Officer Shane Mitchell with the Division of Animal Health patrols the area around a trail ride in Booneville. Animal health enforcement officers work alongside inspectors at various events across the state checking for proper identification and documentation paperwork.

>> of Agriculture, the mission of the seven certified officers of the Division of Animal Health is to protect the health of the Kentucky herd and prevent animal diseases from entering the commonwealth. The division's enforcement section was originally created in 1972 to support the eradication of Brucellosis – a disease that primarily affects cattle and, through non-pasteurized milk, can cause undulant fever in people. At the time, animal health personnel were facing angry farmers whose herd might have one positive result of Brucellosis, causing the entire herd to be taken and often leaving the farmer with an inadequate indemnity.

"To keep order, they needed someone with more authority to say, 'this is the law, we can write you a citation, you can be fined and you can go to jail,'" said Dr. Sue Billings, director of the Division of Animal Health and assistant state veterinarian.

Whether it's at the Kentucky State Fair, the North American International Livestock Exposition, a trail ride at the Land Between the Lakes, or an anonymous phone call on abused, neglected or dead animals on a farm in a rural county, animal health investigators enforce the laws laid out in KRS Chapter 257. Few other law enforcement officers across the state know about these specialized laws.

"Our guys spend a lot of time with sheriffs and county attorneys helping them understand what our laws are," Billings said.

Working with other law enforcement agencies throughout the state is a must for animal health investigators. With only seven officers covering the entire state they rely on assistance from local sheriffs' offices, police departments and animal control. They also work very closely with the Kentucky Vehicle Enforcement and Kentucky State Police on cases such as interstate wrecks involving trailers carrying livestock or livestock theft identification.

In the past year, animal abuse and neglect cases have become all too familiar to animal health investigators. Due to the 2007 drought creating a lack of feed necessary for most farmers to sustain their herds, the division began gearing up for an onslaught of calls regarding neglected and dead animals as the winter approached.

"Animal abuse calls have slammed us this year," Mitchell said. "We tell other agencies they are more than free to call us and we'll come and help them out when we can. Most will say that they don't understand what it is we do and are responsible for. Their idea of a starving animal may be different than what we use as a standard. So we try to show them body-conditioning scoring used to assess animals – we've had quite a bit of training this year on it."

Responding to neglect calls is only a part of what these investigators do on a regular basis. Kentucky is a central distribution point for animals coming from the south and east coast, Billings said. Livestock of all kinds will either get loaded and reshipped from here or often they travel through Kentucky to get to their final destination. In addition, Kentucky hosts the North American International Livestock Expo at the fair grounds in Louisville as well as sustaining places like the Kentucky Horse Park and the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center. Even smaller venues such as livestock markets bring a large amount of livestock into the commonwealth. Investigators and inspectors work together to make sure that all the animals have the proper identification and documentation paperwork.

In recent years, the division has focused on training its enforcement officers in emergency management. Like the rest of the law enforcement community, which has added preparedness for acts of domestic or international terrorism into its everyday objectives, the Division of Animal Health has trained extensively on how a major catastrophe would affect the livestock industry and how its personnel would handle and help contain the situation.

For the division, such a situation could be the intentional introduction of a foreign animal disease, such as Foot and Mouth disease. If Foot and Mouth disease showed up in a stockyard in Kentucky, within three days there could be animals half way across the country infected, Billings pointed out. Because often a diseased animal does not look sickly, inspectors and >>

>> investigators have to closely examine every animal at every venue they are working to ensure the safety of all other animals and people present. For instance, if an animal is suspected of carrying a contagious disease, such as Foot and Mouth, at a licensed stockyard, the U.S. Department of Agriculture would immediately be contacted and the entire stockyard would be quarantined until test results were received. Neither livestock, people, trucks nor equipment would be allowed to leave the premises without going through a thorough disinfection process. These officers have practiced situations similar to this numerous times in conjunction with the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security and other law enforcement entities.

"A lot of what they do is routine with inspections and the like … but you never know what exciting thing is going to happen," Billings said.

Mitchell was part of a team that went to Virginia and assisted officers there during and avian influenza outbreak, where they ended up killing 4.6 million birds to eradicate the disease.

"Farmers are a very independent lot and it can often be quite difficult to deal with a farmer whose herd or flock has a positive result for a disease and an investigator has to come in and take all of their animals," Mitchell said. "They don't like to conform to the rules and regulations and often get very upset at the lack of indemnity or just have a lot weighing on their minds between the loss of the animals and the loss of money involved."

Though there can be big issues and difficult circumstances involved in the position, Mitchell sees the bulk of what he does as behind-the-scenes enforcement and regulation.

"I consider us a very low-key agency," he said. "If I can get in and do my job and get out of Dodge without anybody knowing I've even been there, I consider it a pretty good day."

Bingo! Case solved

Though the officers of the Office of Charitable Gaming may also be seen as low key and inconspicuous, there is nothing discreet about the industry they regulate in the commonwealth. In 2006, Kentucky grossed nearly $530 million in charitable gaming profits, according to the National Association of Fundraising and Ticket Manufacturers' annual report.

The Office of Charitable Gaming provides a regulatory framework allowing charitable gaming to thrive as a viable fundraising mechanism. The office helps to ensure the productivity of charitable gaming through appropriate regulation, oversight and education, and the six certified officers that work for the office's enforcement section take that job seriously.

"I always think of it as maintaining the integrity of the game," OCG investigator Stella Plunkett said. "Not only for the organization, but I always think of the people that go in there and play, because they want to make sure that the game is regulated fairly so they can actually win …. So we enforce the Kentucky Administrative Regulations as well as we do the Kentucky Revised Statutes pertaining to anywhere from promoting gambling to diversion to theft."

Though, like other state agencies, OCG officers have jurisdiction across the state, their jurisdiction is limited to those incidents that occur on the premises of the gaming facility or anything that happens out in the field while investigating a case.

"Because we have limited jurisdiction, some of the things we come in contact with we can't handle," OGC investigator Bryant Smith said. "Even though we are sworn officers, we have to call local police departments or sheriffs' offices to help with certain problems. But if it has to do with charitable funds in any way, we have jurisdiction and we will follow the case wherever it leads."

Since working with local law enforcement is a necessary part of an OCG officer's job, many referrals also come from local law enforcement agencies and KSP, sparking new case investigations. Other cases result from complaints received from individuals who are suspicious of their gaming area as well as money that has been found missing or diverted during an audit conducted by OCG auditors, which also work for the office's enforcement section.

All OCG investigators work out of their homes and are located strategically throughout the state. Cases are assigned according to the region in which they originate. Unfortunately, >>

Volunteers at a local bingo hall in Winchester count money and sort pull tabs and bingo cards. Officers from the Office of Charitable Gaming often visit gaming sites to ensure the profits are handled properly, the volunteers are not receiving tips or payment and there is no illegal gambling taking place on the premises.

AGENCY INFORMATION

Division of Animal Health
Kentucky Department of Agriculture
Seven certified peace officers
Set up in seven regions across the state

Division of Insurance Fraud Investigation
Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet
Nine certified peace officers
Divided into east and west branch with four investigators in the east and five in the west

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources – KDFWR
Commerce Cabinet
149 certified peace officers
Set up in nine regions across the state

Office of Alcoholic Beverage Control – ABC
Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet
32 certified peace officers
Divided into east and west branch with two sections under each

Office of Charitable Gaming – OCG
Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet
Six certified peace officers
Officers located in areas throughout the state

Local Winchester YMCA volunteer assists with calling numbers for a bingo game. In 2006, Kentucky grossed nearly $530 million in charitable gaming profits, giving lots of charitable organizations across the state a big helping hand for fund raising.

cases in some areas of the state are more difficult to work and push through the court system than in other areas, OCG investigator Michael Doane said.

"In some areas that are more economically depressed, if you don't have a dead body or if you're not dealing with Oxycontin, you won't get an indictment," he said.

But prosecution difficulties don't deter OCG officers from actively pursuing those individuals within charitable gaming organizations that are not abiding by the law or cheating charities from receiving the money due them.

"Some of them do pretty good, we don't have a lot of charities out there that are dishonest, but there are a few," Plunkett said. "A lot of times it's a good charity but someone involved with the organization that has dealings with the money does something dishonest without the charity's knowledge. But most charities serve a good purpose and that's what we do is make sure the charity gets the money."

In March, an OCG case in Bowling Green ended when a former Bowling Green Veterans of Foreign Wars post commander and his girlfriend were found guilty of pocketing at least $50,000 intended for the VFW post from pull tab sales. The ex-commander was charged with diversion of charitable gaming funds, two counts of mail fraud, one count of conspiracy to impede an Internal Revenue Service investigation and arson.

"You don't realize how much money is involved," Smith said. "Some organizations will sell $30,000 worth of pull tabs in one night – it's a big business. That's why we try to make sure that the charities get their money out of it. The ones that are stealing money or diverting it to their own use, those are the ones we're trying to go after and close them down."

Because of the large sums of money involved in some gaming locations, occasionally it can be dangerous for OCG officers to go into these facilities after hours.

"Especially if there is $10,000 or more in profit that night and we go in at closing time – banks have been hit for a lot less than that," Smith emphasized. "We are issued weapons and have ASP training and bullet proof vests if a call warrants their use."

OCG officers do all this to protect the industry and prevent the commercialization of charitable gaming. Forty percent of the gross profit that comes into gaming organizations is supposed to go to the charitable organization they represent, and in some cases the money raised is put directly back into the community. For example, some fire departments have used bingo profits to buy trucks and build fire stations, Smith said.

Following the paper trail

Fraud, money diversion and dishonest business gains plague more than just charitable organizations. Housed under the Office of Insurance within the Environmental and Public Protection Cabinet, the Division of Insurance Fraud Investigation was created in 1994. They handle all criminal investigations on insurance fraud, including life, health and casualty insurance and workman's compensation cases.

Mostly operating under the Fraudulent Insurance Act lined out in KRS 304.47-050, the Division of Insurance Fraud Investigation's nine certified officers realize that insurance-related fraud can be committed by anyone. It consists of any fraudulent activity committed by applicants for insurance, policyholders, third-party claimants, agents, employees of insurance companies or professionals who provide services to be paid by insurance. This includes inflating claims, misrepresenting facts to obtain a lower premium, stealing insurance company assets or premiums and submitting claims for injuries that never occurred.

In 2006 and 2007, the division initiated more than 300 criminal investigations resulting in 158 convictions and court-ordered restitution of more than $7 million.

BY THE NUMBERS

$950
Yearly average cost to a Kentucky family caused by insurance fraud

11,258
Active licensed businesses overseen by the Office of Alcoholic Beverage Control

1,100
Commercially navigable miles of Kentucky rivers and water impoundments

84,000
Farms in Kentucky (fourth in the nation)

87,516
Kentucky resident hunting licenses issued last year

800 +
Licensed organizations policed by Kentucky Charitable Gaming

177, 037
Kentucky registered water-going vessels in 2007

>> "Our investigators stay pretty busy," said Tony Dehner, director of the Division of Insurance Fraud Investigation.

"When we have an investigation and it's taken to a prosecutor and it goes to grand jury, it has been a great educational tool to tell jurors how this affects the public on insurance premiums," said Kathy Verhey, insurance program manager for the division. "Until you say that, they don't really understand."

According to insurance-fraud statistics, insurance fraud costs the average family $950 per year. And for the average officer sworn to protect the rights and livelihood of the citizens they serve, that is a big concern.

"Every case is different, but the nice thing about what we have here is combined in nine people we probably have more than 225 years of police experience," Dehner said. "We have a lot of expertise. Our guys have been there, done that, they've seen it, they know how to act."

Despite the combined experience of the division's force, many of Kentucky's citizens and other law enforcement know little about how they serve the commonwealth.

"We're a well kept secret,"Verhey said. "Usually every investigator that comes on board here never knew we existed. They've used other statutes to prosecute things like insurance fraud in the past."

Because the office is still a relatively new concept, educating the public and the judicial system about insurance fraud and the Fraudulent Insurance Act is an added step in the investigative process.

"The FBI will not open a case unless it's $100,000, but we'll open one for $50," said Tommy C. Fields, Investigation supervisor for the division. "That's not usual, but we have worked misdemeanor cases just to get the word out and educate people that this is insurance fraud and it is wrong."

In Kentucky, any case involving less than $300 is considered a misdemeanor and cases dealing with $300 or more constitute felony charges.

Of the various types of cases that are channeled down to the Division of Insurance Fraud Investigation, the most common type of referral received last year was auto insurance, representing 36 percent of the year's caseload. Life and health insurance cases made up 32 percent and workman's comp claims and fraud on the part of the agent or insurer made up 16 and eight percent respectively. However, according to Fields, these last two types of cases are the most highly investigated in terms of time and effort because of their affect on the companies and citizens of the commonwealth.

"Agent fraud is the worst to us because they are taking people's money and making them think they have insurance when they do not," Fields said. "So those insurance agents are going to get scrutinized much harder and more time will be put into the investigation. It may only represent eight percent of our cases, but we probably put in 70 percent of our time with those type of cases."

"They should know better," added Verhey. "An agent should be one of your most upstanding members in your community and most of them are. But some are pillars of society in their communities and in their churches and they are actively taking money and not giving people insurance."

Because there are numerous types of cases that come through the division, investigators sometimes call on other entities to assist them. In cases involving arson to hide evidence of fraudulent activity, they may work closely with KSP's arson-investigation experts to actually work the arson, while they continue to follow the paper trail of the fraud. Investigators have also worked closely with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, FBI, pharmaceutical investigators and other law enforcement agencies during various case investigations.

In March, the division won a case they were working in conjunction with the FBI and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, where a woman >>

A local liquor store, like this one in Richmond, is a typical site for investigators with the Office of Alcoholic Beverage Control to visit. ABC investigators use investigative aides to determine whether particular liquor stores, gas stations or other licensed entities are selling alcohol to under-age individuals. IAs range between 18 and 20 years of age.

>> was sentenced to three years and five months for a $1.1 million insurance fraud scheme.

When investigating a case, the division's investigators also take into account how the case will fair in the judicial system.

"We have to take into consideration prosecutorial appeal or jury appeal," Verhey said. "We don't have a threshold, all sentences are based on the amount of money, not what the crime is."

Fields agrees.

"We don't take any case to the grand jury, in my experience, unless we feel like we can go all the way up to the jury trial and get a conviction," he said. "We don't use the investigation process to punish someone …. Unless we feel like we can go all the way with it, we'll close it out at the bottom level because if they have committed a crime then one of two things will happen – either they won't do it anymore or they'll do it again and we'll catch them again, and then you have a lot more that counts against them."

But, as the division becomes more widely recognized, these expert investigators are able to get many more cases prosecuted through the court system, which helps restore lost money to insurance companies and saves Kentucky citizens money.

Carding 'em

More than saving Kentuckians money, the Office of Alcoholic Beverage Control is, in essence, charged with potentially saving the lives of Kentucky's underage population. Since reducing alcohol sales to minors and combating underage drinking is the main objective for the office, ABC investigators make it a top priority to enforce the plethora of laws that revolve around manufacturing, distribution and retail sale of alcoholic beverages in the commonwealth.

Officers are often challenged by individual clients or licensed businesses they are citing for selling alcoholic beverages to minors, asking why they are so worried about this issue when there are bigger crimes out there, said Ian Thurman, ABC investigator in Jefferson County. Then suddenly, an underage drinker will be involved in a fatal DUI accident after leaving a bar.

"Sometimes it can seem kind of useless trying to fight underage drinking, because everybody knows it's never going to completely stop," he explained. "But part of the motivation is to keep focused on the fact that I may be helping save someone's life down the road."

ABC has several special programs specifically focused on reducing underage drinking. Operation Zero Tolerance is a way of conducting compliance checks of ABC-licensed retailers by using underage investigative aides who attempt to purchase an alcoholic beverage while accompanied by an undercover ABC investigator. If the IA is successful in making a buy, the seller is cited to local criminal court and the licensee is cited to the ABC board.

Investigative aides are students between the ages of 18 and 20 who are paid to work the zero-tolerance detail with the investigators. Most of the students used as IAs are children of police officers or are in some way affiliated with a law enforcement officer or agency, Thurman said. In Louisville, individuals from the Louisville Metro Police Department's cadet program have volunteered.

ABC officers also pair with university police departments in the fight against underage drinking. In Lexington, they have established a task force with the University of Kentucky Police Department that becomes increasingly busy, especially during football season due to tailgating parties. Louisville ABC officers and the University of Louisville have paired up similarly. When ABC officers cite students from either of these universities, a copy of the citation is sent to the school and the students are held accountable by student life for their actions whether on or off campus, Thurman said. In some cases, students are put on probation, showing students their actions on Saturday night will have consequences that last much longer. >>

Though combating underage drinking is the primary focus of the office, ABC officers often work details and conduct investigations into other facets of the industry and come in contact with issues including gambling, prostitution, illegal drug use and sales, and a myriad of traffic-related violations.

"We never know what we're going to get into at any given time – just the nature of us snooping around and being in plain clothes," Thurman said. "We may have to call for backup at the last second, not knowing we're getting into something big."

Ray Roberts, an ABC investigator in Madison County agrees.

"It's fun; it's like fishing," he said. "Sometimes you may be sitting in your car simply watching a parking lot for potential activity when someone approaches you about buying drugs or pills."

Details such as Cops in Shops and Targeted Enforcement Details afford ABC officers the opportunity to work with other law enforcement agencies. ABC investigators often work in conjunction with other agencies and can serve as a great resource for other local agencies.

"We are a good tool for other law enforcement to use because we can spend more time on one place because they are tied up with so many other responsibilities," Thurman said. "If they have one problem that needs to be addressed, we can come in and spend some time on it, whatever the case may be. We can also provide assistance with undercover investigation because they can't go and work undercover somewhere where everyone knows them in town. Or we can provide a small agency that doesn't have detectives with detective-like work."

In addition, there are resources unique to ABC that can open the door, literally, to other agencies during an investigation. If, during an initial investigation, an agency finds there is not quite enough evidence for a search warrant, ABC has search powers in any place that holds an ABC license allowing them to go through the entire building, opening up doors to offices, storage buildings and the like, and may see things normally hidden, out in plain sight, Thurman explained.

Likewise, other agencies can offer a helping hand to ABC investigators by keeping citations and records of complaints and calls to any ABC-licensed site.

"If they're keeping track of citations written to that place, we can use that to build a case against the place," Thurman said. "It's a pretty vague area of ours to charge a place administratively to get an ABC violation, but if other agencies keep their records, we can build a case against the place and potentially have their license suspended."

The job of an ABC investigator can often be a balancing act, Thurman said. Between filing applications for new ABC licenses, doing routine inspections of licensees and enforcing ABC tobacco laws during the day, to watching parking lots outside of bars and liquor stores and conducting undercover investigations in clubs at night, there is always something keeping this unique band of law enforcement officers busy.

It can be very unpredictable and challenging at times, Thurman said. You have to learn to prioritize and keep yourself motivated and organized.

The distinct, unique nature of these five specialized state law enforcement forces is often unpredictable and challenging. But, the exclusive duties of these officers and the time spent serving the citizens of Kentucky, though often unnoticed, are invaluable to the law and order of the commonwealth. J

SUCCESS UNDER COVER

Details such as Cops in Shops and Targeted Enforcement Details, as well as special events such as Thunder Over Louisville and the Kentucky Derby, play a major role in the success of combating various criminal avenues. The Cops in Shops program uses undercover law enforcement investigators who pose as clerks or servers in convenience stores, package stores, restaurants and clubs.

In late March, during a Cops in Shops evening detail in Lexington, Roberts and other ABC officers from in the Lexington area wrote citations for three minors not to possess alcoholic beverages, two minors attempting to purchase alcoholic beverages, two possessions of marijuana, five individuals with no operator's license, one driving on a DUI-suspended license and two DUIs. After the detail, Roberts apprehended a wanted person inside a bar after he fled from Lexington police. The subject was turned over to Lexington police to be served with a warrant.

Richmond Alcoholic Beverage Control Investigator Ray Roberts accesses a database of citations and indictments via a laptop from his vehicle during a nighttime Cops in Shops detail in Lexington. Using a driver's license, investigators are able to pull up background information on an individual that has been stopped for any number of reasons and see if the person has any additional criminal charges on record.